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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1454th MEETING*

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 16 February 1996, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. GHAREKHAN
(Under-Secretary-General,
Special Adviser to the
Secretary-General)

Chairman: Mr. BANGURA (Sierra Leone)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, said that in the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and the thirty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Committee, the Committee's continuing endeavours served as a reminder to the international community that the task of decolonization was not yet at a complete end. The Committee had acquitted itself with great distinction in carrying out the tasks entrusted to it by the General Assembly in 1961, and its successes had changed the international landscape. It was as a result of its work that many member States had joined the United Nations. Over the years, the Committee's relentless efforts to ensure that the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories exercised their inalienable right of self-determination had stood as a beacon of hope for the peoples of those Territories.

2. The Committee's initial task had been daunting in its immensity; it had been to ensure that the principles embodied in Chapter XI of the Charter and in General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) were applied in all Non-Self-Governing Territories. Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and on the basis of the principles of fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination, the Committee had been most successful in discharging those responsibilities over the years. At a time of increasing difficulty for the United Nations, the Committee had made an important contribution to the field of decolonization.

3. There remained 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, all of which enjoyed the inalienable right to self-determination; their options included independence, free association with another State or integration with another State, as set forth in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV). Not all of those Territories were in the same category. The great majority were small island Territories which suffered from various handicaps including limited size, remoteness, vulnerability to natural disasters, lack of natural resources and migration of skilled personnel. In recognition of that fact, the General Assembly had asked the Committee to pay particular attention to the small Territories in order to promote practical, economic and social conditions conducive to the exercise of their right to self-determination. To that end, it was of vital importance that there should be constructive cooperation between the Committee and the administering Powers and regular contacts between the Committee and representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories in order to accelerate the process of self-determination, so that the Committee could keep itself informed of the situation in the Territories and work with the administering Powers in a spirit of cooperation to achieve the goal of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000. He urged all concerned, including specialized agencies and institutions of the United Nations and various regional organizations, to provide all necessary assistance to those Territories. At the same time, he called attention to the need for support from all concerned for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara in the execution of its mandate with regard to Western Sahara, the largest Territory that remained on the Committee's agenda. Such support would be essential in order to overcome

existing obstacles to the holding of a free and fair referendum in the Territory.

4. He was glad to note that in 1995 the Committee, conscious of the changes both in the world situation and in the financial position of the United Nations, had demonstrated a practical and flexible approach to its work. Regrettably, the recent aggravation of the financial crisis obliged him to urge members of the Committee to exercise maximum restraint and economy in the use of the resources allocated to it in the programme budget for the current biennium.

5. He attached great importance to the work of the Committee and assured it of his full cooperation in its efforts to achieve the goals set for it by the General Assembly.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

7. Mr. Bangura (Sierra Leone) was elected Chairman, Mr. Rodriquez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea) were elected Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Al-Attar (Syrian Arab Republic) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

8. Mr. Bangura (Sierra Leone) took the Chair.

9. The CHAIRMAN said that, on the thirty-sixth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and at the mid-point of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the Committee looked forward to working out ever more realistic and effective solutions to the problems of decolonization. Acting within constitutional limits, it would strive to create widespread awareness of the mandate entrusted to it so as to produce tangible results. The Committee would continue to provide encouragement and support to the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories to freely determine their political status. It would not flinch from its responsibility of monitoring political, economic and social developments in the Non-Self-Governing Territories in its usual thorough and in-depth manner.

10. Following the attainment of independence by the great majority of colonies, the traditional concept of colonialism had been relegated to second place. Nevertheless, there were still 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, many of them small islands, and the Committee, the international community and governmental and non-governmental organizations, must unite their efforts to help the peoples of those Territories exercise their right to self-determination with full knowledge of the range of political options available to them. As long as there were Non-Self-Governing Territories and peoples which had not had an opportunity to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, the Committee's task remained unfinished; the suggestion that the era of colonialism was over could not be accepted. The Committee would continue to strive to formulate appropriate measures, paying particular attention to any problems which might

hinder the advancement of the peoples of those Territories to self-determination and independence.

11. The Committee would continue to keep its approach and method of work under constant review in order to adjust to the changing circumstances and improve its efficiency as a natural corollary to recent developments in international relations. In recent years the Committee had demonstrated a practical and flexible approach to its work, as evidenced in its report to the General Assembly. At the same time, it was not losing sight of the interests and welfare of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, which always remained paramount. To that end, the Committee would continue to seek the cooperation of the administering Powers. The decolonization process would be greatly enhanced if the Committee received full cooperation from the administering Powers concerned, in conformity with their responsibilities under the Charter. Regular contacts and consultation between the Committee and the permanent missions of the administering Powers in New York would further expedite the work of decolonization. In view of the target set by the United Nations of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000, he urged the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system to formulate, in collaboration with the regional organizations, programmes that would promote the economic and social development of the peoples concerned so that they would be able to determine their political status.

12. The Committee would do its utmost to achieve economy in its activity in whatever manner it could, without detriment to the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. It would hold as many informal consultations as possible in order to reduce the number of regular meetings.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

13. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to documents A/AC.109/L.1840 and A/AC.109/L.1841.

14. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) suggested that the Committee should hold a meeting of its working group to undertake a broad consideration of its methods of work, taking into account the current financial crisis of the United Nations and the appeals by the Secretary-General to Member States and to the Committee to achieve maximum economy. The Committee secretariat and the Department of Administration and Management should be requested to prepare suggestions on possible savings, to be taken up by the Working Group.

15. His delegation proposed that the Committee should hold its next session in May, rather than later in the year, so that it would be able to prepare its report more thoroughly and so as to enable Member States to formulate their views on the report and discuss them with members of the Committee. That would avoid the problems which had arisen in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee and at the plenary meeting of the General Assembly at the fiftieth session.

16. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said that for many years the Committee had been subjected to a continuing debate on a non-issue that should never have been placed on its agenda. The people of East Timor had exercised their right of

self-determination and had achieved their independence through integration with Indonesia in compliance with General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV), 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XXV). The consideration of the item contributed nothing to the ongoing dialogue between Indonesia and Portugal under the auspices of the Secretary-General and could undermine the Secretary-General's efforts to seek a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question. During the talks held between the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal in May 1994, both sides had agreed on the need to exercise restraint in the interests of maintaining a favourable atmosphere for further progress towards achieving a comprehensive solution of the question. The second round of talks, initiated on 16 January 1996, had entered a crucial phase in which substantive issues relating to the eventual framework for the achievement of a solution were being discussed, along with related issues including the preservation and promotion of the cultural identity of the people of East Timor and bilateral relations between Indonesia and Portugal.

17. The next round of meetings between the two Foreign Ministers was scheduled to begin on 27 June 1996. Indonesia had consistently demonstrated its good faith by extending its full cooperation to the Secretary-General. His delegation therefore objected to the inclusion of the item in the Committee's agenda.

18. Mr. NUÑEZ (Cuba) said that the Committee's work in 1996 was of crucial importance; it was unacceptable that there was still such a long list of Non-Self-Governing Territories as the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism approached. The Committee's work must therefore continue at the appropriate level. In recent months some ideas had emerged in the context of the restructuring of the United Nations that would diminish the importance of the Committee's work or even result in the abolition of the Committee. The programme of work was the best proof that much remained to be done; it referred to 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, and to other Territories where the desire for independence was strong, for example Puerto Rico. It also referred to military and economic activities of the colonial Powers which were impeding the process of decolonization.

19. In Cuba's view, as long as there were people claiming the right of self-determination and independence and petitioners wishing to be heard by the Committee, the Committee had important work to do; it was therefore necessary to increase the resources available to it. Administering Powers must also enable the Committee to send missions to Territories which it had not yet been able to visit. The Committee had clearly demonstrated its flexibility; it was to be hoped that the administering Powers would show the same flexibility.

20. His delegation preferred to maintain the Committee's session in August, particularly since that was a time when petitioners could most easily travel to New York. Any decision taken must take into account the need to maintain the number of the Committee's sessions and the level of Secretariat services.

21. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal), speaking at the invitation of the Chairman, said that East Timor was a Non-Self-Governing Territory as established by the General Assembly in resolution 1514 (XV) and by virtue of that status the question of East Timor had always been on the Committee's agenda. Every year, there had

been a debate in the Committee and the Secretary-General had requested his Government to provide information in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter. His Government had always complied with that request, which confirmed its status as the administering Power of East Timor even though it was being impeded from effectively exercising its administration. Portugal had always cooperated actively with the Committee and fully recognized the Committee's competence and the importance of its role in the question of East Timor.

22. The postponement of the debate on the question of East Timor at past sessions of the General Assembly and of the Committee had never led to the removal of the item from the agenda. The Committee had included the item in its agenda, as in previous years; the item was included in the provisional agenda for the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, and the Committee was to prepare a report for consideration at that session.

23. The decolonization of East Timor was not complete; at a time when talks were proceeding under the auspices of the Secretary-General, any alteration of the framework of the talks would interfere with the exercise of the mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General. Portugal was firmly committed to supporting his efforts, and those of the Committee.

24. Mr. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea) said that, given the pressure on resources, the current stage of the Committee's work was crucial in serving the interests of peoples in the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. In the process of rationalizing its work in the face of dwindling resources, however, the United Nations must not undermine the Committee's mandate and therefore the trust of the people who looked to its moral authority to protect their rights.

25. To assist in confronting the financial difficulties, he proposed that consideration should be given to integrating the work of the Special Committee and the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance. The list of remaining Territories should also be reviewed, and more resources and effort should be concentrated in the areas where goals could realistically be met by the year 2000.

26. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said that Portugal asserted that it was the administering Power for East Timor, but it had failed to take note of the historical facts of the decolonization process. Portugal had abandoned the Territory in 1975, leaving it on the verge of civil war, and thus had relinquished its rights as administering Power. The people of East Timor had then exercised their right of self-determination by becoming part of Indonesia.

27. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal) said that the international community had never recognized the current situation in East Timor, and the process of self-determination had not been completed in accordance with the United Nations principles. Therefore, the Committee still had a mandate to address the issue.

28. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, in order to meet the goal of eradicating colonialism by the year 2000, the Committee must rationalize its work during the current session so that, in the short time remaining before the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, it could complete that great achievement for the United Nations.

29. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said that members would recall that in 1982, the last time a resolution on East Timor had come to a vote in the General Assembly, only 50 had voted in favour, with 90 opposed. That result reflected a trend in voting patterns since the item was first introduced in 1975. Support for Portugal's position had dropped steadily as understanding of the true nature of the situation had increased.

30. Mr. GAMITO (Portugal) said that, nevertheless, the many General Assembly and Security Council resolutions gave the Committee a clear mandate to address the issue.

31. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said, with regard to the proposal of the Russian Federation that the Committee should hold its session in May, that the meetings should be held at a time convenient for petitioners, but efforts should also be made to avoid overlap with meetings of other groups concerned with Fourth Committee issues, such as the Committee on Information.

32. Mr. VISWANATHAN (India) said that he had taken careful note of the message from the Secretary-General, who, during the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, had highlighted the work of the Special Committee as one of the important achievements of the United Nations as a whole.

33. At the previous session, the Committee's new flexible and practical approach had been well received by the administering Powers, and at the current session, it should build on those positive signals to seek their further cooperation. In his view, the Committee should set priorities, taking into account the different levels of development among the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Committee must also innovate: the end of the decolonization process was approaching, but the new realities at the United Nations, along with its financial situation and changing priorities, must be taken into account.

34. The current session would be an appropriate time for a mid-term review of the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Looking at the Committee's achievements in perspective could give new impetus towards its goal. One weakness in the implementation of its mandate was a lack of appropriate information. Given the constraints under which the Secretariat was currently operating, the Committee should seek ways to gather information through regional or non-governmental organizations, which were becoming increasingly active in the United Nations system. Economy, however, should not become a code word for undermining the effective implementation of the Committee's mandate.

35. He favoured holding the Committee's session during the summer, which would probably be more convenient for petitioners, whose input was of primary importance.

36. Ms. YAO Yuhua (China) said that her Government would continue its commitment to the decolonization process. The remarkable achievements in that process had been recognized in recent years, but continued efforts would be required to complete it by the year 2000.

37. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that he had suggested that the Committee's session should be held earlier than usual in order to increase its

effectiveness. Allowing more time between the Committee's session and that of the Special Political Committee would provide an opportunity for the latter to study any resulting proposals and recommendations in greater detail, thus achieving broader consensus. An earlier session would also have advantages from a budgetary standpoint. As for petitioners, he saw no direct linkage between their attendance and the scheduling of the session. Perhaps the month of June would be the most appropriate timing.

38. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) said that, as a supporter of the rationalization of work, he seconded Papua New Guinea's proposal to integrate the work of the Subcommittee with that of the Committee by making the periods of their meetings coincide more closely. Such coordination would have two advantages: the Committee would be more fully prepared for in-depth consideration of its agenda; and petitioners would be able to be present when issues of interest to them were being discussed. Perhaps an informal meeting of an open-ended working group could be held to work out the details of the scheduling of meeting times.

39. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it there was general agreement on the proposal in document A/AC.109/L.1841, paragraph 1, that the Committee should maintain its Working Group and its Subcommittee on Small Territories. With regard to the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee and the Committee, he took it that the Committee wished the matter to be considered initially by an informal working group. In the meantime, he took it that the Committee agreed to appoint Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea) as Chairman of the Subcommittee and Mrs. Khan-Cummings (Trinidad and Tobago) as Vice-Chairman/Rapporteur of the Subcommittee.

40. It was so decided.

41. Mrs. KHAN-CUMMINGS (Trinidad and Tobago) observed that she needed her Government's approval before giving her final acceptance.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee approved the suggested allocation of items and procedure for their consideration outlined in document A/AC.109/L.1841, paragraphs 2 and 3, with appropriate modifications as warranted.

43. It was so decided.

44. The CHAIRMAN, recalling that the Subcommittee was scheduled to meet in May to complete consideration of the items allocated to it, requested it to make optimum use of the limited time available to it.

45. He suggested that, since some of the past recommendations of the Working Group had enabled the Committee to improve its efficiency in the light of developments in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the Working Group should continue to study and recommend ways of expediting the Committee's work.

46. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) asked when the Working Group would hold its meetings. He proposed that it should do so in the second half of March, before the beginning of the Committee session, so that it would have an opportunity to deal with all substantive questions.

47. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it members wished to engage in consultations on that proposal.

48. It was so decided.

49. The CHAIRMAN observed that the Committee would hold a summer session to complete its work and that he intended in the meantime to continue informal consultations with Committee members and other interested parties on a number of pending questions. The Committee would also hold plenary meetings in July whenever necessary to take decisions formally on a number of issues and would complete its work before the end of that month. He asked members to exercise initiative and discretion in finding ways to curtail documentation requirements, in full cooperation with the Organization's efforts in that regard.

50. He drew attention to paragraphs 8 to 10 of document A/AC.109/L.1841 relating to the utilization of conference-servicing resources. It was his intention to convene Committee meetings on time, and he was relying on the full cooperation of all members in that regard.

51. As regarded invitations extended to the Committee, he suggested that it should authorize him to hold appropriate consultations concerning any Committee participation, and the level of representation, in other meetings.

52. Mr. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea) asked whether there was any consensus regarding the timing of the Committee meetings. Cuba had proposed August, and the Russian Federation had proposed June as a compromise. Given the importance of full participation by petitioners and the problem of the financial situation, it would be better to meet earlier to avoid times of peak demand on United Nations resources and facilities; therefore, he would favour June.

53. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it members wanted to engage in further consultations on the matter.

54. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1455th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 4 April 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BANGURA (Sierra Leone)

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

DEPARTURE OF THE CHAIRMAN

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96-80496 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Consideration of the report of the Working Group (A/AC.109/L.1842)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to turn its attention to the open-ended Working Group's report concerning the Committee's organization of work (A/AC.109/L.1842). That report summarized the discussions and recommendations adopted at the meeting held by the Working Group on 29 March 1996. Since the members of the Working Group were also members of the Special Committee, and since all the questions raised by the report had already been debated by the Working Group, he suggested that the report should be considered as a whole.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the report contained an inaccuracy and a contradiction. Paragraph 5 (d) (iii) asked how to ensure that the administering Powers provided the Committee with regular, timely and up-to-date information on the Territories under their administration, in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations. Article 73, however, did not stipulate that the administering Powers should transmit that information to the Committee, but rather to the Secretary-General. He had no objection if the information in question was also transmitted to the Committee, but the terms of the Charter should be respected.

4. The contradiction was between paragraphs 7 and 11 of the report. Paragraph 7 stated that in the absence of the representative of Papua New Guinea (the proponent of the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance with the Special Committee), the Working Group had decided to suspend discussion of that proposal so that it would have the benefit of hearing the representative of Papua New Guinea's idea for integration. Paragraph 11, however, stated that the calendar of meetings of the Subcommittee and the Special Committee for 1996 should remain as it was. Those two decisions contradicted each other. It was important for the Committee to hear the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea and understand his position before making a decision.

5. He also questioned whether the Working Group was empowered to make decisions. He did not see how the Working Group could decide anything, although its ability to do so was implied by the terms of the report. A working group could not make decisions; at most, it could adopt recommendations reflecting the positions of all its members.

6. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) recalled that the Subcommittee on Small Territories had been instructed by the General Assembly to receive the information from the administering Powers and to examine the situation in the small Territories. That mandate could only be modified by a decision of the General Assembly. The Working Group could study proposals aimed at improving the efficiency of the work of the Committee and the Subcommittee, but those proposals could only take effect if the General Assembly endorsed them.

Therefore, it would not be possible to change the programmes of work of the Special Committee and of the Subcommittee for the fiftieth session.

7. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) shared the view that it would be good for the Working Group to have the benefit of hearing the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea's ideas for integration. The Tunisian delegation supported the integration proposal, which should not be perceived as an attempt to abolish the Subcommittee since the questions before it would remain on the agenda of the Special Committee. The proposed integration presented several practical advantages. In particular, it would give delegations enough time to attend all the meetings, which would be reorganized in a more rational manner. The proposed integration would also permit the resolution of the previous years' scheduling problems, which had led to a squandering of resources that was unacceptable during a period of financial crisis. The proposed changes came within the scope of the restructuring that was being undertaken to improve the management and rationalize the work of the Organization. Scheduling the meetings of the Committee and the Special Committee more closely together, or merging them - while providing a sufficient number of hours of work - would also mean that the petitioners only had to be summoned once, instead of being made to return on different dates.

8. As for paragraph 12, he believed that the Working Group should continue its deliberations on the programme of work when the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea was present.

9. Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea) said that his country's Ambassador, who had proposed the integration, was not in New York at the moment, but would return very soon. It would be useful for the Committee to hear from him before continuing its deliberations on the programme of work.

10. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the statements of the representatives of Tunisia and Papua New Guinea underscored the need to postpone discussion of the question of integration slightly - for example, until the beginning of the following week - so that the Committee could conduct a substantive review and make a decision. It would only mean postponing the discussion a few days, and it would also permit the Committee to undertake a more in-depth examination of the question of the scheduling of the meetings of the Committee and the Subcommittee.

11. He wished to make several proposals concerning the Committee's programme of work and the report under consideration. First and foremost, in the interest of conforming with the United Nations Charter, he hoped that the Secretariat would be able to correct the inaccuracy he had pointed out in paragraph 5 (d) (iii) of the report.

12. Secondly, at its meeting on 29 March, the Working Group had reached consensus on the general thrust of the programme of work, but there had been some disagreement on certain specific points, in particular on the plans for the regional seminar. In that regard, the Special Committee should not lose sight of the financial problems being experienced throughout the United Nations system. In order to succeed, it must take a number of elements into account: the interests of the people in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the positions

of the Committee members, and the point of view of the United Nations Secretariat.

13. The Secretariat had made it known that, given the financial crisis, it would prefer the seminar to be postponed. Several delegations had categorically rejected that idea and had insisted that the seminar should be held in May in Papua New Guinea. In his view, the discussion indicated that there was a lack of information about the financial situation, and he therefore asked the Chairman to ask the Controller or one of his representatives to provide the Committee with more details regarding those matters. That would enable the Committee to make the necessary decisions regarding the seminar in full knowledge of the facts, and it would also be helpful to the Committee in its work during the year to come. In deciding the date and location of the seminar, the Committee should, first and foremost, consider the interests of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Since the seminars were being organized for the benefit of their representatives, they were the ones who should decide where and when the seminars should take place. He therefore proposed that the Chairman should embark forthwith on consultations and should write to the administering Powers to determine whether the representative of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories wished to have a seminar in Papua New Guinea on the proposed date. That would enable the Committee to clarify the position of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and to determine who would be attending the seminar; it would therefore be able to better plan the seminar. It would be premature to make a decision regarding the date and location of the seminar before receiving the responses from the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

14. His delegation had written to the Committee secretariat asking what the Committee could do to reduce costs without impairing its ability to fulfil its mandate. He had also asked for an analysis of what it would cost to hold the seminar in Papua New Guinea as compared with what it would cost to hold it in New York. He looked forward to receiving an answer to those questions.

15. Mr. RIVERO ROSARIO (Cuba) took note with appreciation of the report of the Working Group concerning the programme of work for 1996, but he noted that the first three months of the year had already passed; he was greatly concerned by the slow rate of progress. It was high time the Committee made some firm decisions on the issues at hand. One question that needed to be resolved was whether a regional seminar should be held; Papua New Guinea had offered to host the seminar in May, but he did not really see that there would be enough time to contact the participants and organize everything if it were held then.

16. Although he had no particular objection to it, he did not see that it would be useful to invite the Controller to explain the financial situation to the Committee. The Secretary-General himself and other senior United Nations officials had already explained the situation the previous month before a packed house; everyone knew the Organization's financial situation was deplorable. On the one hand, certain Member States had paid their assessed contributions since that time; on the other hand, the General Assembly had already adopted the programme budget for the Committee's activities. There would seem to be little point in having the Controller come before the Committee particularly since,

although it might be useful to know the Secretariat's position, the Committee could hardly allow itself to be told what to do by the Secretariat.

17. Nor should the decision on whether or not to hold the seminar depend on what the administering Powers had to say. If the Committee waited until they gave their opinions, it might find itself in the twenty-first century before any seminar was held. In his view, it was a question of making a political decision and carrying out a mandate. As for determining whether it would be better to hold the seminar in the Pacific, where most of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were located, or at Headquarters in New York, it might be useful to learn the comparative costs of the two possibilities.

18. Concerning the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance with the Special Committee, he had not yet received any documents on the matter and wished to postpone consideration of the proposal to a later date. He none the less agreed with the Iranian delegation that amending the mandate of the Subcommittee or of the Committee itself was not a matter for the Committee to decide, but for the General Assembly. It was not possible, therefore, to change the decisions regarding the current session, including the dates of the meetings of the Committee and the Subcommittee, and he suggested that the Committee should continue its discussion of the proposal while awaiting a General Assembly decision on the matter.

19. Mr. KHAN (Secretary of the Committee), responding to one of the questions posed by the Russian delegation, said that the Secretariat had estimated what it would cost to hold the seminar at Headquarters as compared with what it would cost to hold it at Port Moresby: estimates came to $179,000 and $144,600 respectively. In other words it would cost $34,000 more to hold the seminar in New York. The request for documents revealing the Organization's financial situation and the impact of the crisis on the programmes related to decolonization had been sent to the Controller.

20. Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea) recalled that the purpose of the regional meetings was to give the people concerned an opportunity to participate in the work of the Committee and to express their views. Previously, meetings had taken place alternately in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, where the majority of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were located. Therefore, after consulting with the countries of the region, Papua New Guinea had offered, as it had done in 1993, to host the seminar in 1996. Given that time was of the essence, it was not necessary to wait for the administering Powers to make their position on the question known. In any event, Papua New Guinea would abide by the Committee's decision regarding the location of the seminar.

21. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee and the Committee was very important in so far as, if it were adopted, it would go a long way towards rationalizing the Committee's work. None the less, it should be considered carefully; that could be done when the Committee met in July. However, there would also have to be a General Assembly resolution on the matter because the Assembly had created the Committee. There did not seem to be any point in continuing the discussion of where the seminar should be held since the Secretary had just indicated that it would be less expensive to hold the seminar away from Headquarters.

22. Mr. AKBARUDDIN (India) said that the Committee should consider the proposals for integration of the Subcommittee at a later meeting, as had just been suggested, before referring the matter to the Assembly, if necessary, so that it could adopt an appropriate resolution. Another body was responsible for considering the reform of the United Nations system and it would be more appropriate for that body to look into that question.

23. The proposal to hear what the Controller, or one of his representatives, had to say on the financial difficulties of the United Nations would set an awkward precedent. Any organ meeting to consider its work programme could then ask the Secretariat to explain a situation which everyone understood in general terms, whereas other organs had the express mandate and responsibility for considering the specifics. Members of the Committee were not adequately qualified to make a swift assessment of any consequences which the financial difficulties of the United Nations might have for the work of the Committee. It would therefore be extremely difficult for his delegation to agree to a request by the Committee for an update every two or three months, when it intended to operate within the limits of the resources allocated to it under a General Assembly resolution.

24. Bearing in mind the information provided by the Secretariat concerning the cost of organizing the seminar, the Committee should accept the offer from Papua New Guinea. The question remained whether the Committee should wait for that country's representative to return before making its decision.

25. Mrs. KHAN-CUMMINGS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the Committee had very little time to take important decisions concerning its work programme and, so, sometimes gave the impression of trying to rebuild a house while still living in it. Concerning the organization of the seminar and the restructuring of the Subcommittee's work, it should be remembered that the Subcommittee received its information on the Non-Self-Governing Territories from the representatives of those Territories when seminars were held, and also from petitioners. Petitioners came to air their views to the Committee after the Subcommittee had met. It would therefore be a good idea to reorganize the timetable so that the Subcommittee would effectively have access to the information provided by petitioners. The objective must be to coordinate activities better and make more efficient use of all the means available to the Committee for the fulfilment of its mandate.

26. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said, regarding the integration of the Subcommittee with the plenary Committee, that the Working Group favoured deferring the question so as to study the Papua New Guinea proposal more closely. The schedule of meetings of those two bodies should therefore remain unchanged as long as no decision had been taken. His delegation favoured organizing a seminar in 1996 and considered, taking into account the information provided by the Secretariat, that the meeting should preferably be held at Port Moresby. His delegation had no objection to the Controller addressing the Committee, as the information that he would provide could be very useful in organizing the seminar. His delegation agreed with the Cuban representative that it was not necessary to consult the administering Powers before holding the seminar.

27. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran), referring to his earlier statement, said that, pending a decision by the General Assembly, there should be no modification concerning the Subcommittee. The Special Committee was the only United Nations body dealing with decolonization, so there were no overlaps in that area. It had already rationalized its work by limiting the length of its sessions. His delegation had proposed in 1994 that the schedule of meetings should be organized more judiciously. From the figures given by the Secretariat, it was clear that the cost of organizing the seminar was relatively modest, compared to other United Nations activities - and that was in connection with an issue which had been before the United Nations for years and which remained as topical as ever: several Territories were still not self-governing and a number of populations were still living in conditions approaching colonization. The objective of the seminar was to promote decolonization, and nothing could justify cancelling it in 1996, at a time when the United Nations financial crisis was putting a political slant on the issue. All the members of the Committee would agree, if necessary, to cut the other costs, but the seminar must take place, within the limits of the resources allocated and with the participation of the representatives from the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Committee would have to adopt the timetable of its activities at the present meeting, as there was no other official meeting scheduled before June.

28. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) agreed with those delegations which had called for more information before making a decision. Thus, despite the response from the Secretariat, it would be useful to listen to the Controller, or one of his representatives, as that would help Committee members to better appreciate the financial aspects of organizing the seminar. One might ask how it had been possible to estimate the cost of the meeting, as it was still not known exactly who would take part. The seminar organized in 1995 had brought together 11 Committee members, eight representatives of the Secretariat, and only four representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, almost all of whom belonged to non-governmental organizations. If the Committee did not make better preparations for the seminar in Papua New Guinea, it was more than likely that the majority of participants would be representatives of the Secretariat and the Committee, and that the expenditure would mainly be to cover their travel costs and subsistence allowances. The Secretary-General, in his statement about the financial situation of the United Nations, had clearly stated that the first economy measure would be to reduce travel related expenses. That measure applied also to travel by under-secretaries-general in the case of preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping missions affecting the lives of millions. It was therefore important to be better informed on the financial question.

29. The representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories must be consulted on the organization of the seminar. Certain delegations considered that the task could not be entrusted to the administering Powers. His delegation was not of that opinion and noted that the Working Group's report referred to the development of cooperation with the administering Powers (para. 5 (d)) and the question of how best to secure the full participation of the latter in the work of the Committee (para. 5 (d) (i)). The opinion of the elected representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories should be sought, and decisions concerning matters of such importance should not be made in haste. On that understanding, his delegation favoured holding the seminar.

30. The CHAIRMAN recalled that all the administering Powers had been invited to cooperate with the Committee so that the interests of the populations of the Territories concerned would be properly protected.

31. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia), responding to the delegations that felt that it was impossible to consider that year the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee with the Committee, noted that the problem was not with integration per se; the issue was not a substantive one but a procedural one. Even though the programmes of work of the two organs had already been adopted by the General Assembly, there would be no harm in coordinating the items on their respective agendas more closely and rearranging the meetings of the Subcommittee and the Committee so that they considered decolonization issues in parallel with each other. Such an approach would enhance the effectiveness of the Special Committee and be consistent with the reforms under way throughout the Organization. Instead of scheduling the work of the Subcommittee for June and that of the Committee for July, it might, for example, be arranged that the Subcommittee meet in mid-June and be immediately followed by the Committee. He hoped that the Secretariat would be able to propose something along those lines.

32. Turning to the holding of the seminar, that was the first time that he had heard the matter discussed. After listening to the other speakers, however, he felt that a matter of principle was involved. While the decision to hold the seminar was entirely up to the Committee, that did not obviate the need to determine the objectives and usefulness of the meeting and, as with all other conferences, to obtain the relevant information. Once it was established that the objectives could not be achieved without the seminar, it would still be necessary to try and convince all those who were opposed to it. Since the question merited in-depth consideration, the Committee could not take a decision on it at the current meeting.

33. Ms. YAO Yuhua (China) agreed with the position taken by other delegations on the integration of the Subcommittee with the Committee. It would be better to wait for the return of the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea in order to hear what he had to say and then reconsider the issue.

34. Most delegations were in favour of holding the seminar. It was clear from the mid-term review of the Plan of Action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism that the Committee must complete its work and that hearing the opinions of the populations concerned would assist it in that task. Differences persisted within the Committee, but it was still possible to resume a dialogue and work towards a consensus. The position of the Russian delegation, which had stated repeatedly that the Secretariat's views should be heard, warranted consideration. It should also be noted that, although not a rich country, Papua New Guinea had, in view of the Organization's financial problems, offered to host the seminar, thereby demonstrating its commitment to the course of decolonization. For that, the Committee should express its gratitude.

35. On the third issue - the calendar of meetings - her delegation had no strong feelings and was prepared to go along with the general opinion.

36. The CHAIRMAN, summing up, said that the Committee needed to reach a decision on several aspects of the Working Group's report. On the question of the integration of the Subcommittee with the Committee, all delegations accepted that the Committee could not alter the relevant mandates but could continue to consider ways of enhancing its effectiveness. The Committee would await the return of the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to obtain definite information with which to undertake a substantive review.

37. All delegations were agreed as to the timeliness and usefulness of a regional seminar. Concerning the recommendation of the Working Group, however, only the Tunisian and Russian delegations seemed to have expressed reservations about the need to take a decision at the current meeting. He asked Committee members to state their positions briefly and clearly on the matter.

38. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) said that he had not expressed reservations about the holding of the seminar, he had simply stated his views on a matter of principle. Since the issue had been considered in depth the previous week, he would go along with the position of other delegations as a matter of solidarity.

39. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) disagreed with the Chairman's analysis of the situation: other delegations had in fact expressed doubts about the advisability of taking a decision immediately, without the benefit of the necessary information. However, he agreed with other delegations that the seminar should be well planned. The Committee would have to revert to considering two issues: the integration of the Subcommittee and the Committee, which could be taken up after the return of the Subcommittee Chairman, and the holding of the seminar. He hoped that, by the time it took up the latter issue again, the Committee would have had an opportunity to hear from a representative of the Office of the Controller.

40. Such an approach would only delay the Committee's work by a few days and the Committee would have the satisfaction of knowing that it had not acted in haste without full knowledge of the facts. He was not questioning the need to hold the seminar, but simply suggesting that the issue be considered the following week, once the Committee had heard from a representative of the Secretariat.

41. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said that the Committee must hear from the Controller as soon as possible if it was to come to a decision and hold the seminar in May as planned.

42. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Secretariat's position was perfectly clear and that postponing a decision in order to hear it again was pointless and would only delay the Committee's work. The decision to hold the seminar in May could be taken at the current meeting.

43. Turning to the Committee's calendar of meetings, the Committee should take a decision at the current meeting while keeping in mind the Tunisian proposal. Whether the meetings of the Subcommittee and the Committee could be held closer together depended on the resources available to Conference Services, but for 1996, their meetings must be held separately, on the dates scheduled.

44. Mr. TAPIA (Chile) endorsed the proposal for the integration of the two organs but agreed with the Tunisian delegation that such integration should, to start with, be functional, pending a decision by the General Assembly on structural integration.

45. His delegation felt that the seminar was very important, but that the key issue was where and when it would be held. The information given by the Secretariat clarified the issue of its venue. As for its timeliness, he agreed that the Committee's work was very important, since it was the only organ responsible for decolonization, but felt that the reality of the working conditions and financial problems facing the Organization must be borne in mind. His delegation agreed with the representative of Indonesia that the Committee needed to hear all points of view as soon as possible, in order to have time to organize the seminar properly if it was to be held in May as planned.

46. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee adopt the report of the Working Group as a whole.

47. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) recalled that several delegations considered it advisable temporarily to postpone a decision on the issue. It was not absolutely essential that the Committee take a decision that day. An attempt should be made to reach a consensus so that some delegations would not feel that their position had not been taken into consideration.

48. The CHAIRMAN insisted that the Committee adopt the report of the Working Group as a whole.

49. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the Committee could not adopt the report as a whole because there was a major error in paragraph 3 that needed to be corrected. Furthermore, his delegation wished to express certain reservations. If the Committee chose to ignore the wisdom of delaying its decision by a few days in order to reach a consensus, his delegation asked that its position be reflected faithfully in the relevant documents.

50. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee adopt the report with such amendments as would be required to reflect the concerns of the Russian Federation, on the additional understanding that the Russian delegation's position would be reflected in the relevant documents.

51. It was so decided.

DEPARTURE OF THE CHAIRMAN

52. The CHAIRMAN, announcing his imminent departure, took his leave of the members of the Committee, which he was probably chairing for the last time.

53. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran), Ms. YAO Yuhua (China), Mrs. KHAN-CUMMINGS (Trinidad and Tobago), Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia), Mr. RIVERO ROSARIO (Cuba), Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea), Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic), Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation, Mr. AKBARUDDIN (India), Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUE (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. SOW (Mali), Mr. TAPIA (Chile), Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) and Mr. MILLETTE (Grenada) expressed their gratitude to

the Chairman for the skill and diplomacy with which he had performed his duties, and wished him every success in his new life.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.